

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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SUBJECT: LIFE IN CAMBODIA

SUMMARY: TWO CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICE EMPLOYEES FROM PHNOM PENH HAVE ARRIVED IN THAILAND, AFTER WORKING FIRST IN AN AREA SOUTH OF THAT CITY AND THEN IN THE SISAPHON AREA IN THE FAR NORTHWEST. DESCRIPTION OF THEIR LIFE AND OBSERVATIONS FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY DEBRIEFED DECEMBER 11 TWO CAMBODIAN CRS EMPLOYEES WHO HAD RECENTLY MANAGED TO FLEE THEIR COUNTRY INTO TA PHRAYA, THAILAND. PREVIOUSLY SERVING IN MIKE FORCE UNITS IN SOUTH VIET-NAM PRIOR TO WORKING TO CRS IN 1974-75, THE TWO WERE WELL-KNOWN AND TRUSTED EMPLOYEES OF CRS. THEIR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT EXPERIENCES SINCE THE FALL OF PHNOM PENH ARE THE BEST WE HAVE HEARD IN RECENT MONTHS. UNTIL THEIR FLIGHT TO THAILAND IN MID-NOVEMBER, THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN HIDING THE FACT THAT THEY WORKED FOR AN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION.

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2. FALL OF PHNOM PENH. THERE WAS CONFUSION FOR THE FIRST

TWO DAYS AFTER THE FALL. ONE EMPLOYEE, KIEN SU, WAS SENT IN THE DIRECTION OF KOMPONG SPEU TO THE SOUTHWEST ON APRIL 18 BY KC FEMALE SOLDIERS, BUT THE ROAD BECAME SO CONGESTED THAT THE REAR HALF OF THE EXODUS WAS SEPARATED AND SENT IN OTHER DIRECTIONS. KIEN SU OBSERVED WHEN PASSING THE RUSSIAN HOSPITAL APRIL 20 THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF NON-AMBULATOR PATIENTS WERE LYING ON THE GROUND OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL; THEY TOLD HIM THEY WERE REMOVED TO FACILITATE A GENERAL CLEAN-UP OF THAT BUILDING.

3. RESETTLEMENT. BOTH SUBJECTS ENDED UP IN AN AREA SOUTH OF THE CAPITAL WORKING IN THE RICE FIELDS. THEY LIVED IN SPAY CHUOR VILLAGE (KANDAL PROVINCE) ON ROUTE 30 ALONG THE BASSAC RIVER, 42 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF TAKHMAU. UNTIL THE END OF MAY THEY SAID THEY HEARD THE SOUND OF FIREFILHTS COMING FROM THE DIRECTION OF KOMPONG SPEU, A PERSON FROM THERE TELLING THEM THAT THE FORCES OF LENERAL CHANTERANGSEY WERE STILL ACTIVE IN THE AREA.

4. STORY OF A LIBERATED VILLAGE. VILLAGERS WHO HAVE LIVED PERMANENTLY IN SVAY CHUOR TOLD THE TWO THAT THE VILLAGE WAS NEVER ACTUALLY UNDER GKR CONTROL. THEY CLAIMED THAT FROM 1970 THROUGH 1972 THE NVA CONTROLLED IT. THROUGHOUT THAT PERIOD THERE WAS SPORADIC BUT VIOLENT CONFLICT BETWEEN THE NVA AND THE KHIEU SAMPHAN FACTION OF KC ALSO OPERATING IN THE AREA, OVER THE FACT THAT FULLY ARMED NVA FORCED THE KC WITH ONLY 20 WEAPONS PER 100 MEN TO LEAD ASSUALTS AGAINST FANK POSITIONS, WITH THE NVA FOLLOWING BEHIND. IN 1972 THE NVA DEPARTED THE AREA, RELINQUISHING CONTROL TO THE KC. ACCORDING TO ONE FARMER, THE NVA LEFT HIDDEN ARMS CACHES DISGUISED AS CHINESE TOMBS FOR USE IN THE EVENT OF A RETURN TO THE AREA. THE KC FORCED THE FARMER TO DIG UP SOME OF THEM, UNCOVERING AU-47S AND SKS RIFLES.

5. SVAY CHUOR: SOMIAL. THE NEW ARRIVALS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED INTO THE EXISTING POPULATION OF SVAY CHUOR. MARRIED COUPLES WHO HAD BEEN IN THE ZONE BEFORE APRIL 21 WERE ALLOWED TO REMAIN TOGETHER, WHEREAS NEW ARRIVALS WERE STRICTLY SEPARATED BY SEX BOTH IN THE FIELDS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND AT NIGHT. SEXUAL RELATIONS OR TALK OF MARRIAGE WAS PUNISHED BY PUBLIC EXECUTION, THE TWT CLAIMED. AS JUSTIFICATION, THE KC SAID THAT EVERYONE MUST DEVOTE HIMSELF TO STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY BEFORE THINKING OF RAISING A FAMILY. NO ONE WAS PERMITTED TO LEAVE HIS HOUSE OR BARRACKS AFTER 6:00 P.M. WITHOUT OBTAINING PERMISSION. KIEN SU SAID THE DEATH RATE AMONG CHILDREN WAS EXTREMELY HIGH; ON THE WORST DAY THIRTY DIED, PRIMARILY

OF MALARIA, BURIED IN A COMMON GRAVE. WITH A GENERAL SHORTAGE OF FOOD, STEALING FOOD WAS PUNISHED BY PUBLIC EXECUTION, USUALLY DONE BY RIFLE OR PISTOL.

6. SVAY CHUOR: MILITARY. IN THE FIELDS THERE WAS ONE MALE GUARD TO EVERY TEN MALE WORKERS AND ONE FEMALE PER TEN FEMALE WORKERS. THE KC WORE BLACK PAJAMAS AND PERFORMED SOME WORK. THEY WERE MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL AGES, ARMED USUALLY WITH M-1 AND M-2 CARBINES. AS REFUGEES FROM OTHER PARTS OF CAMBODIA HAVE ALSO REPORTED, THE TWO SAW SOME KC WEARING GREEN UNIFORMS. THEY CARRIED AK-47S OR POSSIBLE SUB-MACHINE GUNS. NONE EVER WORKED IN THE FIELDS. KIEN SU SUGGESTED THAT THEY MAY HAVE BEEN AN ELITE COMBAT REACTION FORCE FOR USE AGAINST POCKETS OF RESISTANCE OR VILLAGE UPRISINGS. HE NOTED THAT THE KC HAD A LARGE TRAINING CENTER AT KOH THOM, 15 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF SVAY CHUOR.

7. TRAFFIC ON THE BASSAC. FROM JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER 14 (WHEN THEY WERE MOVED), THE TWO CLAIMED THEY SAW TWO-TO-THREE GASOLINE BARGES TRAVELLING NORTH ON THE RIVER PER DAY. IN ALL CASES VIETNAMESE--PERHAPS CIVILIANS--PILOTED THEM. ALL FLEW VC FLAGS. THEY ALSO OBSERVED CAMBODIAN-MADE CIVILIAN VESSELS WHICH PREVIOUSLY CARRIED PASSENGERS OUT OF PHNOM PENH USING THE RIVER IN APPROXIMATELY THE SAME NUMBER. THE PESSLES WERE HAULING RICE UP RIVER, THE RICE SACKS MARKED EITHER IN CHINESE OR IN VIETNAMESE. THESE VESSELS FLEW THE USUAL KC RED FLAG. OUR TWO SOURCES PERIODICALLY SERVED AS LABORERS TO UNLOAD THE RICE WHEN THESE VESSELS STOPPED AT SVAY CHUOR, SINCE THE FUNCTION OF THE BOATS WAS TO SUPPLY THE TOWNS LOCATED ALL ALONG THE RIVER.

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8. TRANSFER OF POPULATION. ON SEPTEMBER 14 FIFTY FAMILIES FROM SVAY CHUOR JOINED OTHERS FROM NEARBY VILLAGES TO TRAVEL TO KOMPONG CHHNANG (FIVE FERRY BOATS CARRYING 500 PEOPLE EACH). PASSING BY THE PHNOM PENH DOCKS THE FOLLOWING DAY, THEY SAW NO BOATS, ONLY THE TRUCK BEING LOADED FROM A WAREHOUSE WITH WHAT LOOKED LIKE BRIDGE REPAIR MATERIALS. (THE JAPANESE EMBASSY HERE SPOKE WITH A VIETNAMESE REFUGEE WHO HAD PILOTED A BOATLOAD OF RICE TO PHNOM PENH IN EARLY OCTOBER; HE REPORTED THERE WAS NO SIGN OF LIFE IN THE CAPITAL CITY UNTIL, AFTER A THREE-HOUR WAIT, AN OFFICIAL CAME TO TELL THEM TO UNLOAD THE RICE THEMSELVES AND DEPART.) AFTER ARRIVING IN KOMPONG CHHNANG ON SEPTEMBER 17, THE PEOPLE WERE TRUCKED TO PURSAT IN MOLOTOVA-TYPE SIX-WHEELED VEHICLES WITH CHINESE CHARACTERS STAMPED INTO THE METAL. FROM THERE, THEY MOVED SEPTEMBER 19 IN A 23-CAR TRAIN TO SISOPHON. A KC GUARD TRAVELLED ON TOP OF EACH OF THESE PASSENGER-CARRYING FREIGHT CARS, AND A CAMBODIAN DROVE THE TRAIN. FINALLY, THE GROUP MOVED TO AN AREA ON HIGHWAY 6 NORTH OF KOM PRIN VILLAGE, SLEEPING ALONG THE ROAD UNTIL OTHER WORKERS HAD FINISHED BUILDING WORK CAMP. WHILE WAITING ALONG THE ROAD, THEY OBSERVED A CONVOY TRANSPORTING RICE, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REFUGEES, AND GREEN-UNIFORMED SOLDIERS TRAVELLING IN GMC TRUCKS TOWARD SIEM REAP ON SEPTEMBER 23 OR 24.

9. THE WORK CAMP. THE KC SOON PUT THE PEOPLE TO WORK TO BUILD DIKES AND IRRIGATION DITCHES, AS WELL AS TO WORK ON THE HIGHWAY. THE KC AIM WAS TO PRODUCE A DRY-SEASON RICE CROP IN THE AREA, SOMETHING WHICH APPARENTLY HAS NOT BEEN DONE THERE PREVIOUSLY. THE TWO CAMBODIANS REPORTED THAT PEOPLE IN THE AREA WERE ASTONISHED BY THE IDEA BUT WERE

AFRAID TO TELL THE KC. THEY SAID THAT MUCH OF SISOPHON DISTRICT WAS STILL FLOODED WHEN THEY LEFT IN NOVEMBER (THIS FLOODING PERHAPS ENCOURAGING THE KC TO THINK THEY COULD PRODUCE A DRY-SEASON RICE CROP), WHICH MEANT THAT THERE WOULD BE NO WET-SEASON RICE CROP TO HARVEST NOW IN THOSE AREAS. IN THIS WORK CAMP, FRATERNIZATION WITH MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX WAS ALSO FORBIDDEN. FOOD WAS

OBTAINED PRIMARILY BY FORAGING FOR IT IN THE FOREST.

10. COMMENT. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS SINCE SEPTEMBER
OF LARGE-SCALE POPULATION MOVEMENTS OCCURRING INSIDE
CAMBODIA. THESE OFTEN CONSIST OF FURTHER DISPERSAL OF THE
POPULATION OF PHNOM PENH, PROBABLY TO AREAS--PARTICULARLY
IN THE NORTHWESTERN AND NORTH CENTRAL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY--
REQUIRING AN INCREASE IN THE LABOR FORCE TO WORK THE FIELDS
AND BUILD DIKES. THE STORY OF THE TWO CRS EMPLOYEES IN PER-
HAPS TYPICAL OF THOSE OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF
OTHER CAMBODIANS INVOLVED IN MOVING FROM ONE PART OF THEIR
COUNTRY TO ANOTHER
DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS.
WHITEHOUSE

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